



Foundation Document Overview

Crater Lake National Park

Oregon



Contact Information

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Park Description

Crater Lake National Park—established in 1902—is in southwest Oregon in the south-central portion of the Cascade Range. The park ranges in elevation from about 3,800 feet to just over 8,900 feet at Mount Scott. Near the center of the park is one of its most spectacular features, Crater Lake. At 1,943 feet deep, it is the deepest lake in the United States. The lake is in a caldera, which was formed when the top of 12,000-foot Mount Mazama erupted and collapsed about 7,700 years ago. Over the centuries, the caldera has collected water from rain and snow to form the lake. The lake is about 5 miles in diameter and is surrounded by the jagged, steep-walled cliffs of the caldera left by the climatic eruption. The cliffs surrounding the lake rise from 500 to 2,000 feet above the lake’s surface.

From the rimmed summit, the land slopes gradually downward in all directions. There are no inlets or outlets to the lake, and evaporation and seepage prevent the lake from becoming deeper. Crater Lake has no influent or effluent streams to provide continuing supplies of oxygen, nutrients, and fresh water and is considered a youthful lake with a high level of purity. The lack of dissolved minerals greatly restricts the growth of aquatic plants and the absence of sufficient carbonates inhibits the development of large-shelled animals. The result is a high level of light penetration that exceeds other alpine lakes. Crater Lake has been the object of scientific study for more than a century.

The park encompasses approximately 182,304 acres and is heavily forested, except for a number of treeless, pumice-covered flats. Streams originating on the slopes of the caldera form headwaters of the Rogue River to the west or join the Klamath Basin to the south and east. Steep-walled canyons cut through pumice and towering fossil fumaroles contribute to the ruggedness of the terrain.

The flora within the national park is typical of the vegetation found throughout the Southern Cascades and ranges from mixed conifer forest dominated by ponderosa pine in the south to high elevation mountain hemlock and whitebark pine forest at the rim. The park is regarded as a sanctuary for native forest and meadow communities.

The park lands are of continuing importance to members of American Indian tribes. Klamath Indian and Umpqua people tell stories of the eruption of Mount Mazama, and artifacts found buried under Mazama ash and pumice are evidence of the great impact the eruption had on people living in the area.

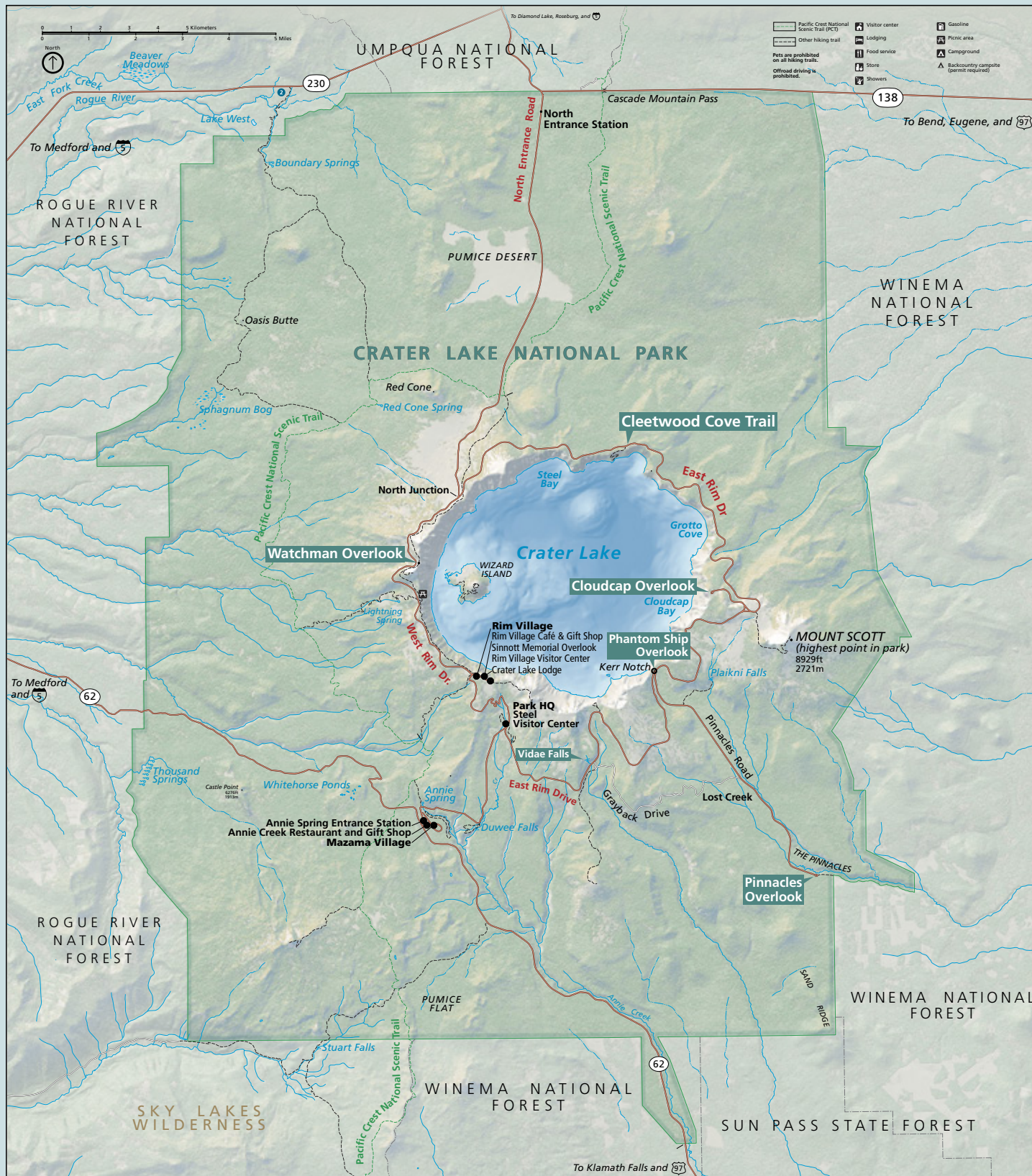


Crater Lake was used as a place for vision quests and prayer, and the surrounding areas were used for resource harvesting activities and other cultural traditions. The park is part of a larger cultural landscape that extends well beyond park boundaries. Today, the park is fortunate to have the support of local and regional partners, who contribute to the protection of resources and enhance visitor experiences.

The park’s southern entrance station at Mazama Village is 76 miles from Medford and 56 miles from Klamath Falls and can be reached by Oregon State Route (OR) 62. During summer the park can also be reached from the north by OR 138. Both access roads lead to Rim Drive, a 33-mile roadway that circles the caldera rim. Rim Drive and OR 209, which runs through the park, have been designated as part of the Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway, and numerous pullouts provide scenic lake views.

The park is one of many opportunities for visitors in the area. Many people stop at the park as part of a north-south trip to various parks and scenic areas in Oregon and Northern California. In recent years park attendance has approached 600,000 and continues to grow. As a leading attraction in Southern Oregon, visitor spending contributes significantly to the regional economy.

Park Map



Purpose



CRATER LAKE NATIONAL PARK forever preserves Crater Lake, scenic landscapes, volcanic features, and unique ecological and cultural heritage, and fosters understanding and appreciation through enjoyment, education, and inspiration.



Significance

Significance statements express why Crater Lake National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The magnificence and splendor of Crater Lake are realized by the lake's geographic setting, untrammelled condition, and unique combination of biology, chemistry, and physics, including the lake's remarkable clarity, color, and depth.
- Crater Lake National Park provides exceptional opportunities for visitors to experience spectacular mountain scenery and volcanic landscapes, dark night skies, clean air, and natural sounds and quiet. As part of the High Cascade region, the park is part of one of the snowiest landscapes in the United States and provides year-round access for recreational activities and wilderness experiences such as solitude.



Significance

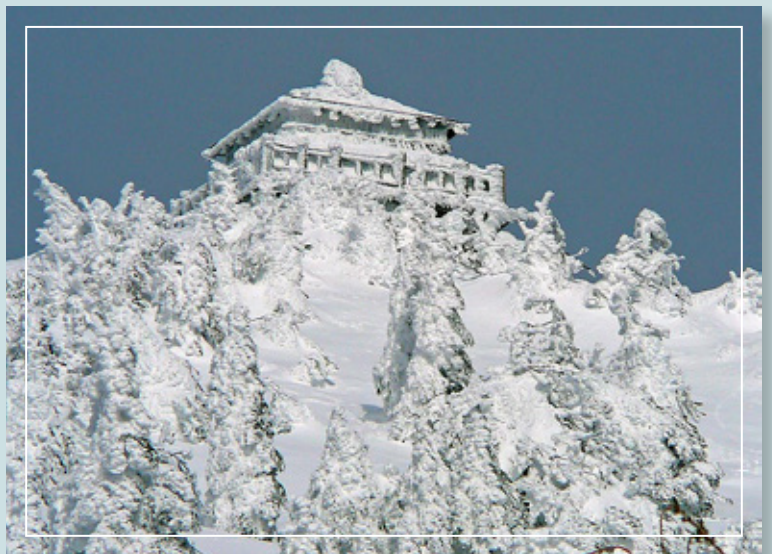


- The parklands include an assemblage of native vegetative communities that have largely escaped human alteration and remain essentially intact. The diversity and natural stability of these assemblages support a full complement of flora and fauna, contributing to the resilience and integrity of the greater Mazama ecosystem.
- Crater Lake National Park contains archeological, architectural, historical, and material collections related to the settlement of the area and development of the park. Much of Rim Village, park headquarters, and Rim Drive are within districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and the park exhibits one of the best examples of blending rustic architecture and built features within a national park setting.
- The lands within Crater Lake National Park are of enduring importance to contemporary members of American Indian tribes because of their centrality to longstanding cultural traditions and resource harvesting activities, as well as their significance as sacred sites. The park is part of a larger cultural landscape that extends well beyond park boundaries.
- Crater Lake National Park is recognized as an outstanding laboratory for research on natural systems and processes. Crater Lake has been the object of scientific investigation since the late 1800s, making it the most studied caldera lake in the world and creating an internationally important long-term body of scientific knowledge. The park's legacy of scientific inquiry incites new research that continually informs management, enhances education, and promotes stewardship of the park's natural and cultural resources.
- The climactic eruption and collapse of Mount Mazama more than 7,700 years ago formed an array of distinctive geologic features, such as the caldera, pumice desert, and pinnacles. These features are extraordinary in that they are geologically young, exposed, and well-preserved.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Crater Lake** – Crater Lake National Park’s world-renowned caldera holds one of the clearest, bluest, and deepest lakes in the world. Its clarity and color is due in great part to the lack of suspended particulates and extremely low organic productivity. It contains significant and active hydrothermal features, which, among other lake qualities, have made it one of the most extensively monitored lakes of its size in the world. Its impressive scale and geographic setting within the high Cascade Mountains create lasting memories and inspire visitors.
- **Enduring Legacy of Human Relationships with the Landscape** – People have been drawn to and linked to the Crater Lake area for millennia. Its botanical resources and volcanic past have been incorporated into American Indian cultures and today retain great significance to them and to people who have more recently created ties to the landscape. The park’s extensive museum and archive collections document ethnobotanical, anthropologic, and historic artifacts and stories. The park’s rustic Cascadian architecture and Rim Drive demonstrate how nature has influenced the built environment and record the evolution of the National Park Service role in managing the park.
- **Distinctive Volcanism and Geology** – The cataclysmic, geologically recent eruption of volcanic Mount Mazama spewed 12 cubic miles of magma and had a significant impact on the landscapes and people of the area. The caldera continues to impress visitors and scientists with its steep, jagged walls and visible geologic record. The volcanic activity that created the caldera and built Mount Mazama over the last 400,000 years continues to influence the greater ecoregion.



Fundamental Resources and Values



- **Complex and Varied Hydrological Resources and Processes** – Crater Lake has no inlet or outlet and is maintained by a balance of surface evaporation, precipitation that can exceed 500 inches per year, and intricate seepage through a thick layer of permeable glacial till. The park encompasses several perennial lakes and ponds, more than 250 wetlands, 24 year-round streams, 1 high elevation bog, and the headwaters for several major rivers.
- **Representative Cascade Mountain Ecosystems** – Much more than a lake, the park contains highly intact and heterogeneous vegetative communities essentially unaltered by humans. Its natural disturbance regime and connectivity to surrounding protected areas make it an important refuge for common and endemic terrestrial and aquatic species.
- **Awe-Inspiring Scenery** – The steep jagged walls of the caldera rim, clear blue waters of Crater Lake, and vast unaltered native vegetative communities are beloved and oft-cited scenic treasures of Crater Lake National Park. The park's clean air and minimal light pollution allow visitors to see for miles and experience dark night skies in a nearly pristine condition.
- **Vast Body of Knowledge and Opportunities for Research and Education** – The youth and integrity of Crater Lake and the volcanic caldera, as well as the remarkable quality and diversity of ecosystems in the park, make the park an invaluable natural laboratory and classroom that has inspired scientists to collect a prodigious body of knowledge since the late 1800s. This extensive data set contributes to Crater Lake National Park's usefulness as a gauge to measure and describe human impacts on the natural environment.

- **Abundant Opportunities for Visitor Connections to Nature and History** – An extensive network of recreational and educational opportunities permits a diverse set of visitors to appreciate the park from many perspectives. More than 90 miles of trail, 36 scenic overlooks along Rim Road, guided tours, charismatic architecture, minimal light and noise pollution, and numerous interpretive programs provide intimate access to the park's natural and cultural heritage in every season. Place-based, life-long learning opportunities offer visitors additional ways to study and understand park resources.

Crater Lake National Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway All American Road** – One of just 27 All American Roads in the United States, the Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway connects Lassen Volcanic Park in Northern California and Crater Lake National Park in Southern Oregon. The volcanic activity of the Cascade Range has created unique geological formations and influenced the development of dense forests, broad wetlands, and clear streams that can be seen while traveling along the byway through the park.
- **Segments of the Pacific Crest Trail** – The Pacific Crest Trail spans 2,650 miles from Mexico to Canada through California, Oregon, and Washington. The trail provides commanding vistas of volcanic peaks in the Cascade Range, and 33 miles of the trail traverse the park, where a side trail leads to the rim for a spectacular view of the lake.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from, and should reflect, park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Science and the Lake** – The inventory, monitoring, observation, and research of Crater Lake over long periods of time produce robust data that scientists, educators, and decision makers use to understand, and become better stewards of, this and other caldera lakes around the world.
- **Geology and Landscape** – A nearly unfathomable force of nature in the form of a massive volcanic eruption, occurring 7,700 years ago, began a long, slow, and natural process that continues to shape the landscape in and beyond park boundaries.
- **Cascade/Mazama Ecosystem** – The establishment of Crater Lake National Park enabled the preservation of the extraordinarily rich biological diversity of the Cascade/Mazama ecosystem, which is continuously supported by ongoing research efforts and actions.
- **Cultural History** – From a sacred place of power and danger to one of the very first national parks, the Crater Lake landscape has changed and been changed by humans for thousands of years.
- **Scenery and Visitor Recreation** – Crater Lake’s breathtaking beauty, seasonal weather extremes, clear skies, and distinguishing natural and cultural features, combined with a variety of recreational opportunities, provide visitors with abundant chances for discovery, reflection, and inspiration.
- **Human Environmental Impact** – The pristine nature of Crater Lake and the surrounding environment is an excellent barometer with which to measure and describe human impacts on the natural environment, ranging from invasive species and air pollution to climate change.

